

Students where are you?

by Giovanni De Grandis - Monday, 1 June 2009, 03:55 PM

I have noticed that apart from a small group of students who contribute regularly to the forums, the majority is not participating or not doing so regularly. I would like to understand the reasons of this limited participation, but I need your help to do so. I would greatly appreciate any clue or explanation of the reasons that are holding back the students who are not regularly present on the forums. In particular, I would like to know whether there is any feature of the discussions that is disturbing you, or intimidating you or that is putting you off. If you would like the forums to be somehow different, this is the place to express your wishes, worries and complaints.

Thank you in advance for your help 😊



Re: Students where are you?

by Sanda Galina - Monday, 1 June 2009, 09:26 PM

I'm surely one of those contributing to the silence. While I read all forums which I genuinely enjoy, I often feel that my knowledge regards the subject is limited and therefore I have been more of an observer than active contributor.

Political Philosophy to me is a new subject, prior to this course I had never heard of most of the philosophers discussed. Personally, to understand ones view I want to know more about the person, times they have lived, circumstances etc, so I think while I have been reading on that I've had less time to focus on discussions.

I don't think there is anything that I wish to change regards the forums, certainly I have no complaints. I think the course is quite intense, at least for me and well structured. But whether I have political thinking in me, is yet to be discovered. 😊

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Re: Students where are you?

by Gloria Portella - Monday, 1 June 2009, 09:47 PM

I'm learning a lot from this course, especially through text and posts readings. I love to contribute to the forums, and I've been doing my best to do so. Specifically this last week, I've been limited by a strong sinus infection (15 days of antibiotics, starting three days ago) but one thing that seems to be hard for me to deal with is the length of the texts posted. We usually have a lot of pages to read and keeping up with the posts definitely has been something difficult for me. I wish the posts were shorter so that we could interact in a more constant basis and move forward with different points quickly, instead of going deeper. This is what I expected, considering this is an undergraduate course. However, this has been a great learning opportunity for me, I promise I'll put more effort in participating at the forums.

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Re: Students where are you?

by Ivor Middleton - Monday, 1 June 2009, 10:40 PM

The things that most likely put people off are :

- 1) Not wanting to appear ignorant;
- 2) Behind on the reading, so as (1);
- 3) Fear of flame mail (rude responses to posts);
- 4) Expecting that you need to write a lot;
- 5) Just plain shy.

As we are mostly new to this, most of us going to appear ignorant. I'm sure I have. Two or three of the students are clearly quite erudite, but they might be useful to the rest of us, maybe even politely pointing us in the right direction - occasionally 😊

I don't like to post when I am behind on the reading - I've been quiet on last week's topic ! Just got to work harder at finding 15 minutes here, 20 minutes there to keep up.

Rudeness is a tricky one. Emails can look ruder than they are intended, especially when topics are being debated. I quite like pointing out that there is an alternative point of view if I spot one. I relish seeing someone doing the same to me. It polishes up your thinking and exposes the blind spots. Or should that read "confirms your worst prejudices" 😊

Long posts are unnecessary and inhibit a conversational tone in forums. Also they have lots of ideas in them, so that responses have to be long. I much prefer several short posts where one idea can be focused on and discussed in each. That definitely encourages more to take part. So IMHO you don't need to write a lot !

(Perhaps there should be an Essay forum for posts containing ideas which need a longer development).

I'm not shy. But I do like talking to anyone, shy or not, so please do respond if you have any thoughts about my posts.

Regards,  
Ivor

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Re: Students where are you?

by Simona Vecerskyte - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 03:20 AM

Ivor,

I enjoy reading your posts very much. They are interesting, well thought-out, clear and easy to read. I also like your sense of humour.

And, could you please share your secret of how you make those "15 minutes here" and "20 there"? 😊 I really need this recipe in detail (so this time I won't mind if to answer this question you will need to write a loooong post 😊).

Simona

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Re: Students where are you?

by Ivor Middleton - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 03:31 AM

Aah. Do as I say, not as I do ! I'm struggling to keep up this week.

Off to sneak another 20m catching up.

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Re: Students where are you?

by Ivor Middleton - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 03:29 AM

I guess I should have added, "It always helps to disagree politely, if you do disagree."

Easy to say, not always easy to do, I know.

I would hope people do still feel they can disagree with a post. A good debate in a political philosophy forum has to be worth double the time spent reading.

Regards,

Ivor (looking forward to you giving me a hard time - nicely).

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Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Monday, 1 June 2009, 11:47 PM

Guilty as charged, Gloria and Ivor. Guilty as charged. Unfortunately, philosophy does not lend itself well to headlines. Also, think of it this way, while it takes me an hour or more to complete a lengthy response, it only takes you 5 minutes to read.

(I kept this one short, didn't I?)

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Gloria Portella - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 12:28 AM

Kevin, philosophy does lend itself well to headlines. Actually, from my perspective, short sentences implies a great knowledge. No one is able to write a short sentence if he/she does not know really well the subject, that's why the great philosophers were able to make sense of themselves in just one sentence: they knew what they were talking about.

I have just finished a course in Theory of Knowledge which is much more complicated than this

one, for the concepts and wording, and no one was allowed to post more than two or three lines. It worked very well and we had wonderful discussions. So, by experience, I can assure you that shorter posts are wellcome in courses about philosophy. 🤔

Just as an example on how small texts can be powerful:

"All of us who are concerned for peace and triumph of reason and justice must be keenly aware how small an influence reason and honest good will exert upon events in the political field."  
(Albert Einstein, 1954)

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Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 04:47 AM

Perhaps you ought to spread the blame a little bit, Gloria. In reading your explanation for your recent absence from the fora one would believe that I have singlehandedly prevented you from contributing. Wouldn't it have been closer to the truth if you had said that the reasons for your absence are several: a recent cold, two children and a husband to take care of, language barrier, professional duties, laziness perhaps, the need to sleep nine hours a night maybe, etc?

Further to that, my inability to express myself in headlines, as you would have it, is a reflection of my lack of knowledge. I apologise for not living up to your high standards, but we all have to make due with what little fate has endowed us with. I guess I don't know what I'm talking about. Be that as it may, I am eager to be illuminated by you, if you would rise to the challenge.

"That's why the great philosophers were able to make sense of themselves in just one sentence", you say. Pray show one philosopher who has explained his/her Lebensanschauung in just one sentence and I will henceforth express myself in just one phrase every time I post. And that's a promise.

The precedent you cite (i.e. your previous course) as an example to emulate for the brevity of its postings need not be our cast to follow. Every course and every class has a life of its own. But if you had ever taught you would know that.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Nicola Conway - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 06:06 AM

...And so Kevin demonstrates why people are reticent to post.....

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Gloria Portella - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 06:45 AM

Kevin, to begin with, I defended my point of view, like you it or not, agree you with it or not. You're a bright man with a clear emotional problem: you simply cannot control yourself. Living in community does require from everyone a minimum of education and respect to others, something you definitely do not care about. I agree 100% with Nicola. And using your terminology and direct approach, I do think that if you were less emotional and more balanced in your speech other students would feel more comfortable to join our forums.

By the way, Giovanni, I'm sorry to post this words right now, but I'm not participating at a political philosophy course at Oxford for having my right to kindly express my points of view disrespected by someone who feels he is the center of the Universe. Unless you tell me I'm obliged to, I'll not participate in the forums anymore. And here, again, is my suggestion: ask everyone to keep the posts short, in the end, we are here to exchange ideas not to feel as we were obliged to discuss in the rithm Kevin wants to impose nor to discuss his nonsenses. Good Luck!

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 08:03 AM

Well, I guess the time has come to call a spade a spade. People like you Gloria have stopped posting because of one or all of the following reasons:

1. They find my superior intellect humbling.
2. They dislike my socio-political theories but have no moral or logical arguments to discount them.
3. The truths I painstakingly spell out force them to look deep inside their hearts and face their demons, be they deep-seated prejudices, class conceit, or false loyalties.

Is that concise enough for you?

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Re: Students where are you?

by Simona Vecerskyte - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 01:41 PM

Giovannni,

I think that Kevin's egocentrism, impoliteness and inability to tolerate different opinions have become seriously unacceptable and unbearable.

At first, after his long letter to you, where he praised himself for his posts and his "thinking out of the box", I decided to simply ignore his posts, because that was a little too much for my understanding of a civilised discussion. However, now I cannot stay silent any more, because his remarks about other people and their lives, their opinions and especially those about their intelligence have gone completely out of control and are seriously damaging the discussions.

Are there any rules for such cases of serious infringement of the netiquette? I believe such posts as the one he wrote to Gloria should be simply banned.

Simona

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Re: Students where are you?

by Nicola Conway - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 02:13 PM

Giovannni,

I would like to second Simona's post. Kevin has been a bully on these boards and it has been due to the nature of the course, being as it is online, that has made it possible for him to continue to

behave as he has - with a total lack of manners or respect for others. I could continue on in this vein but Simona has made the point well already.

Nicola.

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Re: Students where are you?

by Sanda Galina - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 02:12 PM

Kevin. I find your contribution to this forum rude, inappropriate and disrespectful to Gloria and others who are reading for that matter.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Patrick Moran - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 02:47 PM

Kevin,

I have found many of your posts to be genuinely thought provoking but on occasions I personally have found your language to be immoderate and indeed on one or two occasions, extreme.

Emotions run high when important issues are at stake but I find your last two posts totally unacceptable and extremely rude. I am shocked by them.

Giovanni,

This situation cannot be allowed to persist. I add my support to Gloria, Simona, Nicola and Sanda.

Patrick

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Giovanni De Grandis - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 01:01 AM

Kevin, as other students have already pointed out this message of yours is unacceptable and disruptive of any cooperative, friendly and respectful atmosphere, which is the necessary



prerequisite for any successful discussion and cooperative learning.

This ranting must stop.

I will delete any further message which I consider inappropriate.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 04:24 PM

Dear all,

I find your sense of justice oddly uneven considering that it is Gloria who attempted to scapegoat me for her absence from the forums, and then, in finding herself challenged, resorted to irrational insults.

If anyone has a problem with the "length" of my postings or the "forcefulness" of my arguments, then you have all failed to win a fair dispute and ought to have the integrity to accept defeat and to acknowledge the true reasons of your voluntary withdrawals. After all, I have not forced anyone to engage with me and I certainly did not put a gun to anyone's head to read my lengthy postings.

So if you don't like what I have to say, stop trying to silence me on trumped up charges. It is unbecoming of the philosopher's ethic and achieves nothing more than to stifle the real potential and true purpose of philosophy, which is "to make one's beliefs consistent in areas in which it's not clear what to believe" (<http://thewebofbelief.blogspot.com/2006/06/purpose-of-philosophy.html> ).

Note also that in attempting to control the form and content of what I have to say you are committing a far greater offense than my alleged rudeness.

I tell you what. Since I am a firm believer in the value of direct democracy, I suggest that we put this issue to a vote. Should a majority of the total number of students find that I should stop posting then I will, should however a majority of students find that I should continue posting to the best of my abilities and without restrictions in length or form dictated by a dissatisfied minority then I will and you shall bite your tongues until the end of the course.

My only condition is that all students without exception should cast a vote. Should we fail to get everyone to vote, we should drop the issue or leave it in Giovanni's hands.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Giovanni De Grandis - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 01:06 AM

There will be no vote whatsoever.

We will deal with this issue.

I have deleted your message from the 'freedom of speech and religion forum', since the forums are the place to discuss their proper subject, not to put anyone's ego on the vote.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Ivor Middleton - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 03:20 AM

Kevin,

Lighten up !

Regards,

Ivor

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Giovanni De Grandis - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 01:09 AM

Gloria, you should have emailed me rather than answering in kind to a personal attack.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Gloria Portella - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 03:05 AM

Dear Giovanni, self-defence is a right recognized by the various law systems around the world isn't it? And I think that my response was far away from "in kind". But it was not my intention to create a situation of discomfort and I apologize for having responded to Kelvin publicly, in instead of having emailed you.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Giovanni De Grandis - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 12:56 AM

Kevin, your reply to Gloria is aggressive and amounts to a personal attack, which is totally inappropriate, uncalled for and therefore unacceptable.

The rules of our netiquette are clear and explicit enough:

'Flaming', or flying off the handle and ranting at someone else, is not acceptable and any such postings will be removed from the discussion forums. If you think you have been offended by someone please do not 'flame' on the discussion forum, as this makes things unpleasant for the whole group. You can take the matter to your tutor, who will help you to resolve it.

Besides, they also state explicitly:

6. Keep your messages short and to the point

When composing your messages, aim to express your thoughts concisely. Obviously you will want to explain your point, but of course if you write a very long message it has the same effect as someone 'holding forth' or 'rambling' in a face-to-face discussion. Lengthy postings do not hold people's attention and are less likely to get a response.

Unfortunately I only saw your message when the discussion had further developed and your attacks on other people's intelligence and motives have become unbearably rude and gratuitous. I am going to consult the online course manager about the necessary disciplinary action. In the meanwhile I think that a sincere apology to other students would be most appropriate.

Giovanni

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Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 03:57 AM

I sincerely apologise for any offense I have caused and I look forward to concise and constructive

discussions in the last remaining forums.

Kevin

Show parent



## Disclosing the truth

by Giovanni De Grandis - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 05:09 PM

Kevin has asked me to make public an email from May 18 in which he asked me if he should step back from the forums in order not to inhibit the other students and to which I replied that I did not think it was necessary. Given how things have evolved I may well have been wrong and have my share of responsibility for people's dissatisfaction with the forums. With the benefit of hindsight I should have been more proactive in discouraging long postings, but it seemed to me that at least some students did find interesting Kevin's contributions.

However, to cut the story short, here is my correspondence with Kevin:

(June, 3. Kevin to Giovanni)

Giovanni,

In all fairness, I think that before you and your advisors cut me off from the course you should mention to the class that I have approached you for advice on whether I should step back from the forums or not and you have explicitly advised that I should not. I saw this coming and tried to prevent it. I attach our correspondence below:

-----Messaggio originale-----

Da: kevin galalae [mailto:kgalalae@hotmail.com]

Inviato: lun 18/05/2009 19.06

A: tutor.politicalphilo

Oggetto:

Hi Giovanni,

I could not help but notice that Ivor and I have become too dominant in the fora discussions. Would you like me to step back to make room for the others? I don't want to be overbearing. On the other hand, I don't want to withhold valuable contributions. Please let me know how to proceed.

Kevin

Hi Kevin,

first of all I am sorry that I had not yet answer to your email from Friday. I have had some troubles with my connection over the weekend and it slept out of my mind. I am very glad that you are enjoying the course so much. I am not teaching online again until next year, but I hope you are still coming to Oxford in August and that we will be able to have a little philosophical chat.

As for your present question, I don't want you to step back or to reduce your contributions. My only suggestions would be two very minor tips. The first is to try not to write messages too long. Let me be clear, most of your message are not too long. A few are a little long and that might discourage those who don't have a lot of time. I also realize that sometimes it is very difficult to develop one's argument in a short space. When you have a long reasoning, my advice is to write the complete argument in an attachment and to give a summary in your post. Those interested will certainly open the attachment and read the whole argument, those with less time or less philosophically minded will read at least the summary and get the essential. (By the way writing a short summary is always a difficult and extremely useful exercise). The other advice is that if you disagree with someone else, unless s/he is someone who is confident and keen on debate (like Ivor, Bruce, Gloria) do not shot all your arrows at them at once: that can be intimidating. Make one objection, trying to single out the one which is more likely to trigger some rethinking and to bring about the most serious difficulty in the position criticized.

Keep enjoying and contributing generously!

Best

Giovanni

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 05:16 PM

I could not help but notice how perfect the timing for such a vote is, given that this week's topic is freedom of speech. To take advantage of this coincidence I am opening the vote of my right to continue posting on this week's "freedom of speech and religion forum". I thank everyone in advance for their participation.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 07:49 PM

I believe I have already clearly demonstrated how incapable representative democracy is to safeguard democracy's dearest principles: the right to free speech, equal access to power, and universally recognized freedoms and liberties. If we were to allow the party of the malcontent - represented by Nicola, Simona, Patrick Moran, Sanda, and Gloria - to have their way unchallenged they will have silenced me and thus castrated the democracy they purportedly hold dear. Now let us see how a direct democracy would treat a nonconformist like me, one who puts uncomfortable ideas in people's faces, and who dares to challenge the common sense.

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Gloria Portella - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 09:33 PM

"If you believe in freedom of speech, you believe in freedom of speech for views you don't like. Joseph Goebbels was in favor of freedom of speech for views he liked. So was Joseph Stalin. If you're in favor of freedom of speech, that means you're in favor of freedom of speech precisely for views you despise." (Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media, 1992)

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Re: Students where are you?

by Josua Pretorius - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 12:49 AM

I don't know if it is an excuse or not, as everybody here is quite busy in their normal lives, but maybe I need more time per day to complete my daily required studies in this and have been falling behind a little. As interesting and mentally stimulating I find the curriculum, as complex and time consuming it is for me to keep pace with it as it is all new to me.

Also in between limited internet and 14 hour work days sometimes, I am finding it quite hectic the last 6 weeks, which has been quite beneficial to me (I think).

At the moment I have still to catch up on a week before to catch up on this one again. And so on and so on.

But once again I must stress my complete enjoyment I find in the work material when I do find

myself with time to immerse myself in it.

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Re: Students where are you?

by Bruce Davis - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 01:44 AM

I imagine that this week was dominated by assignments, but I agree about the need to keep forum posts short and to the point. It can be difficult to write something new after the fact so to speak - and it can sometimes be difficult to follow a long post dealing with a complex point which may or may not be 'on topic'. Overall I would say compared to the other philosophy courses I have done with Conted this one has had more open forum questions which have generated debate which has verged into the politics of now more than the philosophical sometimes (the problem of the topic we discussed in week 1...). It may well be a function of the content we are studying than any comment on the more prolific posters amongst us.

If we could make it a rule that posts should seek to make salient points but not necessarily answer the whole question and therefore leave space for others to contribute whose timetables are not so flexible as others?

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Simona Vecerskyte - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 03:18 AM

At work. 😊

Here May and June are the busiest. The workday often ends at 9:30pm.  
(since our lives are too short to read everything that is truly worth reading, I believe I should not take the time of others with my poor late-night-posts).

Then the pace - by the time I get home and log in, everyone has already said so much about the topic, that sometimes there is nothing else to add. When there is, I still have to do the reading of the textbooks. So I keep getting ready until it is too late - either someone else writes what I wanted to say, or we move to another week.

But I really enjoy the course and the discussions. Even if I do not contribute much to the forums, I do read and I learn a lot. 😊

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Giovanni De Grandis - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 01:17 AM

I would like to thank all the students who have given me useful feedback about their participation in the forums and their feelings about the course. It is very helpful for me to hear your impression and your suggestions.

I think that there is a shared desire to keep the messages short and focussed, and hence I think that we should definitely try to do so and to have short postings that will hopefully make it easier to engage with each other.

I am sorry that within this forum there has been an unpleasant episode of flaming that has run out of control. We are going to deal with this episode and I am expecting to see a calm, relaxed and constructive atmosphere quickly restored.

Giovanni

Show parent



Re: Students where are you?

by Ivor Middleton - Wednesday, 3 June 2009, 03:46 AM

Giovanni,

Thank you for this. I expect everyone has got it out of their system and we can all go back to being humble philosophers.

Regards,  
Ivor

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You are logged in as Kevin Galalae from Portal: Login to the site (Logout)

politic-phil